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Entrance Fee Revenues Dipped Slightly in 2010 Across the National Park System From 2009 Levels

Submitted by [Kurt Repanshek](#) on January 28, 2011 - 1:10am

Entrance fees revenues across the National Park System dipped slight in 2010 compared to 2009, although National Park Service officials aren't sure what was behind the decline.



Fees from park specific passes, daily entrance fees, the various interagency fees, and commercial fees totaled \$125,776,233 last year, down from \$129,640,627 in 2009, according to figures tracked by Jane Moore, the Park Service's fee program manager in Washington, D.C. (Of the 394 units of the National Park System, just 139 collect entrance fees.)

Daily entrance fees showed the biggest drop, declining from \$84.5 million in 2009 to \$78.5 million last year. Whether the three fee-free weekends last year accounted for the lion's share of that decline is impossible to say, according to Ms. Moore.

"It's really hard to quantify revenue loss with fee free days. Yes, we know there are some losses, but the things that affect visitation are so variable: weather, gas prices, competing recreation and leisure activities, overall travel and trip expenses, park closures, etc.," she said. "Also, our revenue is reported monthly. We don't have a good way to monitor revenue by the day, so we do our best to compare monthly revenue reports/statistics to look at overall trends."

Fee Free Days and Visitation Trends

Visitation impacts and trends directly related to the fee free days are hard to quantify. Our limited review of the initial free weekends indicated some sites experienced an increase in visitation, others saw no effect and some even had small decreases in visitation depending on the weekend.

After talking with some of the parks after the last free days, our feeling is that parks that are near population centers are most likely to see visitation increases on the free days. However, other factors can have a significant impact. For example weather, even if there is a large population near the park, if the weather is bad it seems that people did not take advantage of the free day. Parks that are not near population centers, were less likely to see any increase on the free days. This is likely explained by the fact that the cost and effort to get to the park outweighed the incentive of the free days.

Beyond the direct impact of how many additional people visited a park during one of the free days there is likely many indirect impacts. Free days could indirectly play a role in increasing visitation throughout the year due to increased publicity for the NPS. The amount of exposure and media around the free fee day was clearly a tremendous benefit to the service. The extensive publicity in newspapers across the country, on the internet and from social media reminded the public of the magnificent heritage that the national park system preserves and that national parks offer an affordable vacation option even with a small entrance fee.

Further, the coverage using new social media may have introduced a new younger group to the parks. The increased publicity and good will generated by itself is a substantial benefit of the free days.

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Submitted by Dave Crowl (not verified) on January 28, 2011 - 9:24am.

Personally I do not like the free days idea. On one hand it may encourage someone to visit a park that has never done so in the past or allow someone who cannot afford to. On the other hand it can make the crowds large and parking tougher. I would be mad if I had planned a vacation in advance and then had to deal with extra crowds. I would suggest find another way to distribute the free passes to people and let them choose when they want to go. As for me the entrance fee is not going to stop my trips.

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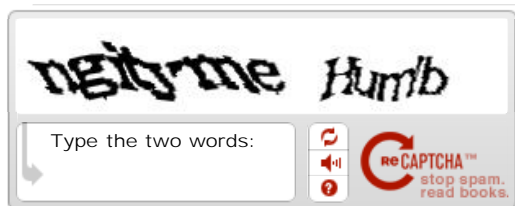
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